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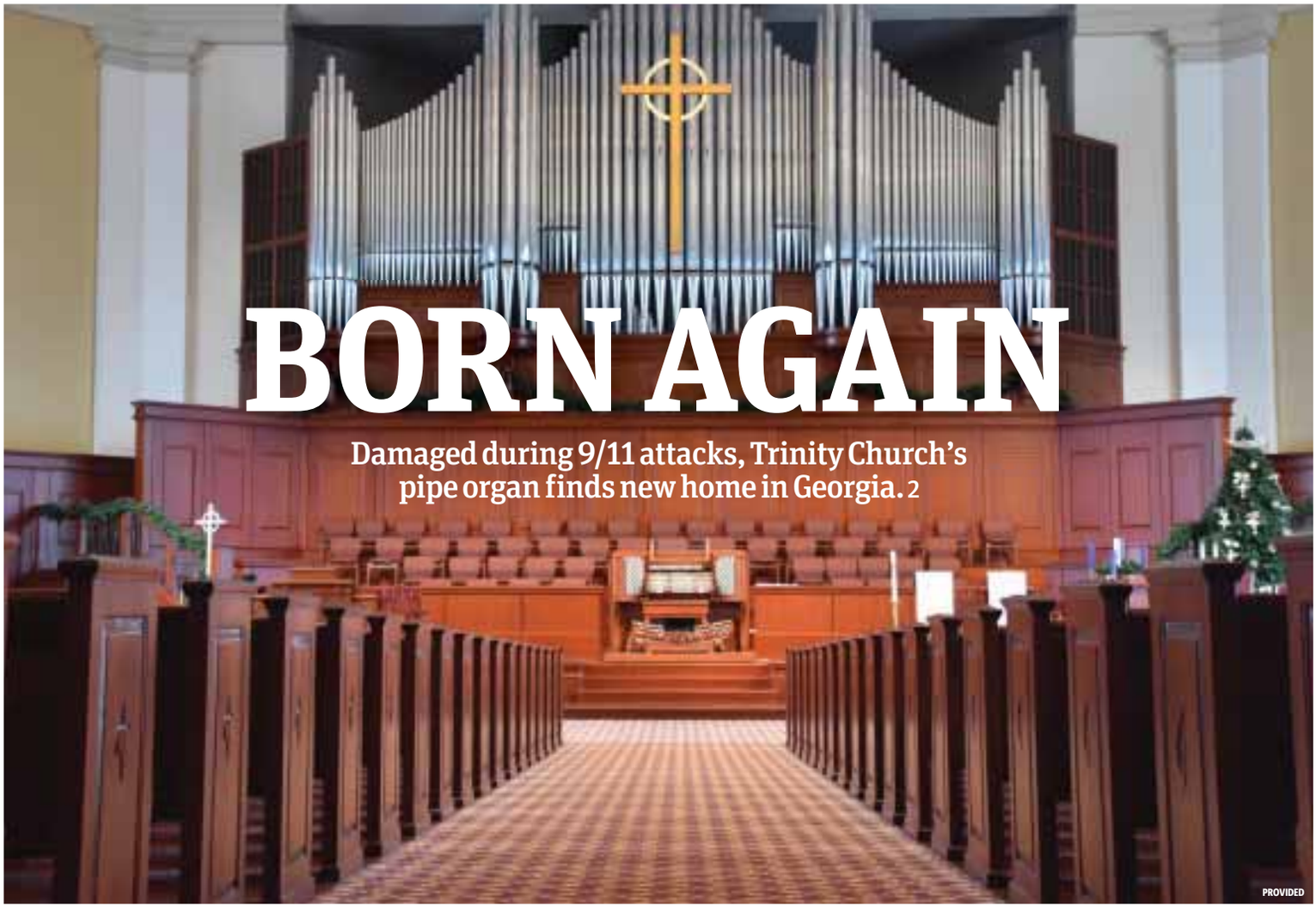

BORN AGAIN

Damaged during 9/11 attacks, Trinity Church's pipe organ finds new home in Georgia. 2

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3 things you need to know

OBAMA TO DELIVER FAREWELL ADDRESS IN CHICAGO ON JAN. 10

President Barack Obama will deliver a farewell address on Jan. 10 to reflect on his time in office and say thank you to his supporters, he said in an email statement released on Monday. Obama, noting that the first president of the United States, George Washington, had penned a farewell address in 1796, said he would deliver his speech in his hometown of Chicago. "I'm thinking about [the remarks] as a chance to say thank you for this amazing journey, to celebrate the ways you've changed this country for the better these past eight years, and to offer some thoughts on where we all go from here," he said. Republican Donald Trump will be sworn in to office on Jan. 20. During his campaign for the White House, Trump pledged to undo many of Obama's signature policy measures, including his health-care law. Obama, who campaigned hard for Trump's Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton, has sought to ensure a smooth transition of power despite major policy differences with his successor. He also leaves his party without a clear figurehead as he leaves the White House. "Since 2009, we've faced our fair share of challenges, and come through them stronger," Obama said in the email, likely foreshadowing a theme for his speech. "That's because we have never let go of a belief that has guided us ever since our founding — our conviction that, together, we can change this country for the better." REUTERS

GETTY IMAGES

AROUND 60 KILLED AS DRUG GANGS CLASH IN BRAZIL PRISON MASSACRE

2 Around 60 people were killed in a bloody prison riot in the Amazon jungle city of Manaus sparked by a war between rival drug gangs, officials said on Monday, in the worst violence in over two decades in Brazil's overcrowded penitentiary system. The head of security for Amazonas state, Sergio Fontes, told a news conference that the death toll could rise as authorities get a clearer idea of the scale of the rebellion sparked by a fight between rival drug gangs. Fontes told reporters that several of the dead had their decapitated bodies thrown over the prison wall — and that most of those killed came from one gang. "This was another chapter in the silent and ruthless war of drug trafficking," he said. Pedro Florencio, the Amazonas state prison secretary, said that the massacre was a "revenge killing" that formed part of an ongoing feud between criminal gangs in Brazil. The riot began late Sunday and was brought under control on Monday morning, Fontes said. Authorities were still counting the prisoners to determine how many had escaped, he added, with reports that up to 300 fled. Just as the riot began in one unit of the Anisio Jobim prison complex, dozens of prisoners in the second unit started a mass escape in what authorities said was a coordinated effort to distract guards. REUTERS

POPE TELLS BISHOPS TO HAVE ZERO TOLERANCE FOR SEXUAL ABUSE

3 Pope Francis has told bishops around the world they must adhere to a policy of zero tolerance for clergy who sexually abuse children and begged forgiveness for "a sin that shames us." In a letter sent on Dec. 28 but released by the Vatican only on Monday, Francis said: "I would like us to renew our complete commitment to ensuring that these atrocities will no longer take place in our midst." "[The church] recognizes the sins of some of her members: the sufferings, the experiences and the pain of minors who were abused sexually by priests. It is a sin that shames us," Francis wrote in the letter. But victims' groups say he has not done enough, particularly to hold to account bishops who tolerated sexual abuse or covered it up. REUTERS

The refurbished organ has found a home in the Johns Creek United Methodist Church in Georgia. PROVIDED

NYC's Trinity Church organ resurrected in Georgia

The massive instrument was all but ruined by debris from the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center.

ALAN KRAWITZ
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For nearly 80 years, the mighty organ at Trinity Church in lower Manhattan had faithfully served its congregants, belting out music for all occasions from weddings and funerals to daily services.

The organ was silenced on Sept. 11, 2001, when terrorists carried out suicide attacks on the World Trade Center towers — a few blocks from the historic church. Dust and debris all but ruined the massive instrument.

Trinity removed the organ shortly thereafter and replaced it in 2003 with a digital organ.

Today, Trinity's organ is once again making music at its new home in Johns Creek United Methodist Church, just outside Atlanta, Georgia.

"We're pleased the people of Johns Creek United Methodist Church have brought this beautiful instrument back to life and are using it in their services," said the Rev. Phillip A. Jackson, vicar of Trinity Church. "We hope it brings their community many years of joy as they worship together."

The resurrection the behemoth 7,000-plus pipe organ was certainly not a given. It sustained significant damage that would prove to be both costly and time-consuming to repair and restore.

"The dust was so pervasive throughout the instrument, so pervasive throughout the building … Everything was covered — everything," Owen Burdick, then Trinity's music director, told NPR.

Nathan Frank, Johns Creek's music director, recalled that the process of acquiring Trinity's organ was akin to an "adoption," facilitated through an organization called Organ Clearing House in Massachusetts.

The organ was silenced on 9/11, when terrorists carried out suicide attacks on the WTC towers — a few blocks from the historical church.

Frank recalled there were several churches interested in "adopting" Trinity's organ and that Johns Creek UMC was interviewed and ultimately chosen to be the recipient of the instrument in 2013.

Johns Creek had been planning to build a new sanctuary that could house a large pipe organ. But finances were tight and the cost of purchasing a new organ — more than $5 million —was prohibitive.

So, Johns Creek decided to restore Trinity's donated organ to use in their new sanctuary. The congregation of about 450 families raised about $1 million to have Canada-based Casavant Organ Builders clean and restore the instrument.

"The timing of Johns Creek's search and Trinity's need to clear the space where the organ was being stored was a total coincidence that led to the church becoming the new home for this magnificent piece of history," Frank said.

The congregation was "truly excited about the prospect of bringing this one-of-a-kind instrument to Johns Creek," he added.

"We restored approximately 70 percent of the organ [about 5,000 pipes]," Frank said. "There are another 2,000 pipes in a second chamber at the rear of the sanctuary that may be restored at some point in the future."

The restoration took about a year. Installing the organ in the church took another three months. The organ was dedicated during a ceremony last month.

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Minimum wage increases to $11 in NYC

The statewide minimum wage hike took effect on New Year's Eve.

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New York minimum wage workers' first paychecks of 2017 will be slightly bigger.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed into law in April incremental increases that will grow to $15 an hour statewide by 2021.

The first statewide increases took effect on New Year's Eve. In New York City, workers at businesses with at least 11 employees will be paid no less than $11, up from $10.50. Wages will be raised $2 every year until 2018.

For the city's fast-food workers the raise was greater — $12 an hour.

For businesses with fewer than 11 employees, minimum wage will increase to $10.50, and the increments will be $1.50 every year until 2019.

New York City fast-food workers strike for better pay in July, 2013. ANNETTE BERNHARDT/CREATIVE COMMONS

In Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester counties the new wages will be $10, increases will be $1 a year until 2021. And in the rest of the state, the new minimum wage is $9.70, and will increase 70 cents every year until it hits $12.50, and then continue to increase on an indexed schedule until it hits $15.

New Jersey workers saw a modest minimum wage increase of six cents take effect Jan. 1 for a total of $8.44 an hour.

Although federal minimum wage remains the same at $7.25 an hour, a vigorous national movement to boost wages will see its fruits in 19 states this year.

BRIEF

Police: Queens shooting is first homicide of 2017

New York City's first known homicide of 2017 took the life of a 31-year-old man who was shot Monday morning during an attempted robbery in Queens.

Ricky Kalisaran was fatally shot in the chest and his brother Sunny Kalisaran, 24, was hospitalized after trying to disarm a robber on 124th Street near Liberty Avenue in South Richmond Hill at around 3:25 a.m., police said.

Friends told reporters that the younger brother was unaware his sibling had died when he was taken to Jamaica Hospital for gunshot wounds to his back.

The brothers were walking from The Underground Lounge to their gray Infiniti after 3 a.m. when the gunman demanded their valuables.

According to police, the brothers refused to hand anything over and instead struggled for the gun.

An accomplice in a dark sedan pulled up and drove off with the gunman, police said. A few blocks away, the getaway car crashed into another car and then sped away on the Belt Parkway, reported the New York Daily News. No other injuries were reported.

Ricky Kalisaran, 31, was killed. RICKY KALISARAN/FACEBOOK

A co-worker told the Daily News that he believes Sunny Kalisaran was the target because of his flashy gold chain — and that others had tried to rob him of it previously.

"He's told me he used to go to different clubs, people [tried] to rob him for his chain, his jewelry," said the co-worker, identified as Martin, 36.

Residents said they have witnessed many fights, crimes and disturbances coming from The Underground Lounge over the years.

"We've been waking up to many fights before," said Jennifer, 30, to the Daily News.

"I've lived here since I was 3, and I'm 30. Every day you hear someone from this neighborhood is passing away, and it's so sad, it really is." AMANDA MIKELBERG

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Completion of Sandy repairs jumps to 60 percent

After failing to finish in four years the Build It Back program quickens pace.

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Superstorm Sandy rubble heaped in the Rockaways on Nov. 18, 2012. TIMOTHY KRAUSE/CREATIVE COMMONS

By the second anniversary of the storm, the effects of the overhaul were already being felt: 789 homes had started construction.

Mayor Bill de Blasio's pressure and new appointments to the Sandy repair program helped quicken the pace of work completed since the storm's fourth anniversary in October.

New statistics showed that the Build It Back program's completed Sandy-related construction projects increased from 44 percent to 60 percent of the 5,349 households it promised to help.

This means that of the 8,374 homeowners that remained in the program during its seemingly sluggish progress, 90 percent have either received checks from the city or have had the city at least start construction on their homes.

However, some from the 5,349 homeowners have dropped out of the program since October.

Shortly after de Blasio announced that the city would not be able to deliver on its pledge to rebuild every Sandy-damaged home by its fourth anniversary, the city hired Lou Mendes, a former Bloomberg official with experience in the 9/11 cleanup and construction of the 9/11 museum, to expedite the problematic Build It Back initiative.

"The team has been hard at work completing hundreds of projects and getting families home for the New Year. Every home and family is unique. This is painstaking work," Amy Peterson, director of the Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations, told the New York Daily News.

"We intend to continue to push the pace throughout the winter," Peterson said.

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Delaware man wounded, survives deadly attack at Istanbul nightclub

Jake Raak, a 35-year-old Delaware resident, was among around 60 people injured in the shooting early Sunday morning. FACEBOOK

Jake Raak told news outlets that he survived the ordeal that killed 39 by playing dead.

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An American man shot in the New Year's Eve attack on a nightclub in Istanbul says he survived the early morning ordeal by playing dead as a gunman fired more than 100 rounds into the crowd early Sunday morning.

"When he shot me I didn't move — I just let him shoot me," Jake Raak, 35, told NBC News. "I was shot when I was already on the ground. He was shooting people that he had already shot."

Raak, from Greenville, Delaware, said the gunman sprayed bullets through the crowd and targeted those who were lying on the floor. ISIS has since claimed responsibility for the early-morning bloodbath, allegedly targeting Christians in a statement posted to Twitter.

More than 60 people were injured and 39 were killed — most of whom were foreigners — in the rampage at Istanbul's Reina nightclub around 1:30 a.m. Sunday. The incident lasted barely 10 minutes.

Raak was with a group of about nine people, seven of whom were shot. The Chadds Ford native said he was shot in the hip and the bullet traveled to his knee.

"You just have to stay as calm as you can," he told NBC News. "I took a bullet."

Surveillance footage of the suspect has emerged as a manhunt is underway in Turkey. The chilling footage shows the gunman — armed with a long-barreled firearm and dressed in black, wearing a backpack — outside the club before storming inside.

He killed a police officer and civilian outside, then sprayed bullets on the crowd at Reina, packed with an estimated 500 people celebrating the new year.

Turkish police have detained eight people and are questioning them in connection to the attack. Authorities believe the shooter, however, carried out the attack alone.

ISIS forces posted a statement on Twitter early Monday claiming responsibility for the attack.

"In continuation of the blessed operations which ISIS carries out against Turkey, a soldier of the brave caliphate attacked one of the most popular nightclubs while Christians were celebrating their holiday," the statement, which has not been independently verified, said.

Another statement, released through a news agency unofficially tied to the terror group, claimed the attack was retaliation against Turkish military involvement in Syria.

"You just have to stay as calm as you can ... I took a bullet."

Jake Raak told NBC News

"When he shot me I didn't move — I just let him shoot me."

Jake Raak

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Islamic State claims Istanbul attack, gunman remains at large

Photos of Istanbul nightclub terror attack's victims are placed at site in Istanbul, Turkey. GETTY IMAGES

Authorities are close to identifying the gunman, a Turkish spokesman said, after gathering fingerprints and information on his appearance, and had detained eight other people.

Relatives and friends mourn during a funeral for a victim. GETTY IMAGES

Islamic State claimed responsibility on Monday for a New Year's Day mass shooting in a packed Istanbul nightclub that killed 39 people, an attack carried out by a lone gunman who remains at large.

It described the Reina nightclub, where many foreigners as well as Turks were killed, as a gathering point for Christians celebrating their "apostate holiday." The attack, it said, was revenge for Turkish military involvement in Syria.

"The apostate Turkish government should know that the blood of Muslims shed with airplanes and artillery fire will, with God's permission, ignite a fire in their own land," the Islamic State declaration said.

At a news conference in Ankara, Turkish government spokesman Numan Kurtulmus made no reference to the claim but said it was clear Turkey's military operations in Syria had annoyed terrorist groups and those behind them.

"This attack is a message to Turkey against its decisive operations across the border," Kurtulmus said, adding that the offensive in Syria would continue until all threats to Turkey were removed.

"This attack is a message to Turkey against its decisive operations across the border."

Kurtulmus

NATO member Turkey is part of the U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State and launched the incursion into neighboring Syria in August to drive the radical Sunni militants, as well as Kurdish militia fighters, away from its borders.

The jihadist group has been blamed for at least half a dozen attacks on civilian targets in Turkey over the past 18 months; but, other than assassinations, this is the first time it has directly claimed any of them. It made the statement on one of its Telegram channels, a method used after attacks elsewhere.

Nationals of Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Morocco, Libya, Israel, India, Canada, a Turkish-Belgian dual citizen and a Franco-Tunisian woman were among those killed at the nightclub on the shores of the Bosphorus waterway. Twenty-five of the dead were foreigners, according to the state-run Anadolu news agency.

All of those killed died from gunshot wounds, some of them shot at a very close distance or even point-blank range, according to a forensics report quoted by Milliyet newspaper.

Police distributed a hazy black-and-white photo of the alleged gunman taken from security footage.

The authorities believe the attacker may be from a Central Asian nation and suspect he had links to Islamic State, the Hurriyet newspaper said. It said he may be from the same cell responsible for a gun-and-bomb attack on Istanbul's main airport in June, in which 45 people were killed and hundreds wounded. REUTERS

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Why Aren't Doctors Telling About These Two Often

Two Advanced Medical Treatments Every Knee Arthritis Sufferer

By *NY Pain MD*

***NY Pain MD* is a medical clinic with locations in Midtown NYC and Uptown NYC that has treated thousands of knee arthritis and joint pain patients.**

Here is what every knee arthritis sufferer should know about the best treatments and options available today. Including when and why you should consider each of these 2 treatment approaches to get maximum results.

If you suffer with knee or other join arthritis pain, you have probably already tried many treatments ... especially countless pain medications. Experienced doctors understand that, even though pain medications such as anti-inflammatory pain pills are part of the recommended early treatment plan for knee arthritis pain... they are rarely the answer over the longer term.

In most cases they have minimal results (if any) and have a laundry list of potential side effects. Some being serious and even life threatening.

Are There Any Better Options?

Thankfully, advancements in science and technology come extremely fast. And now there are two very good options for knee arthritis to help relieve the pain.

Two options that a lot of knee arthritis sufferers have never heard of.

Before we get into the two treatments, please understand this...

NY Pain MD is a well established medical clinic that has treated thousands of knee arthritis sufferers and joint and back pain sufferers. Patients travel from all over the area and even several states away from NYC to be treated at one of their clinics because they want the best medical treatments available. What you are about to discover are two REAL medical treatments. Not miracle cures you see on infomercials or non-medical treatments promoted on the internet.

Know this fact: There is no cure for arthritis. But there are these two treatments that have already helped thousands of knee arthritis sufferers - possibly just like you.

The first treatment is more common than the second. Even if you have heard of this treatment - or even tried it without good results - please read this. You will find out why it may not have worked for you and how you may be able to get much better results.

#1 Viscosupplementation

Viscosupplementation has gained quite a bit of popularity in recent years and it has gotten mixed results for a couple of reasons.

But before we get into that,here's what you need to know about viscosupplementation.

When you have arthritis, you suffer a decrease in the lubrication fluids in your knees.

In other words, your knee joints basically "dries up."

The lubricating fluid that decreases is called "synovial fluid." pharmaceutical companies (with the help of doctors) can now make ***natural*** synovial fluid gel-like compounds that, during viscosupplementation treatments. Doctors can precisely introduce directly into the knee and other joints.

This helps replace the lubricating fluid to the knee joint - allowing it to move more freely and smoothly and often decreasing or even eliminating the pain.

What Results Can Be Expected?

Like all medical treatments, the results vary and can not be predicted. But many knee arthritis sufferers get dramatic results. It is not uncommon for patients to either postpone knee replacement surgery for years... or even permanently cancel it.

But There Is A BIG Problem

The key is the treatment must be EXTREMELY PRECISE. If the procedure is slightly off, the medication will not get into the knee joint and the treatment will not work.

That's why the experts at ***NY Pain MD*** use Precision Arthritis Targeting Technology so they can actually see the lubricant going directly into the knee joint during the treatment.

Research shows that doctors performing joint injections without this technology can miss the joint as much as 30% of the time.

If you have tried viscosupplementation without this imaging technology without good results - this may be why.

That's why ***NY Pain MD*** takes it even one step further. They do not just use one step process of advanced imaging during treatment - they use two in their "double confirmation" process. This is to ensure patients get the best possible results.

Another Important Factor

Viscosupplementation medications also come in several different "brands" and chemical make-ups. Just like all medications, some people respond better to one than another. So, the experts at ***NY Pain MD*** use several and great effort is taken to figure out what is the best one for YOU.

One last thing: The experts at ***NY Pain MD*** have found that earlier you start Viscosupplementation the better.

This is most likely because the longer you wait - the more joint destruction takes place.

That's why ***NY Pain MD*** is now seeing so many patients as young as 35 to 40.

Summary: If you have knee arthritis pain and have not tried. Viscosupplementation you should look into it as soon as possible.

If you have tried it without good results. you may still be able to get great results with the proper imaging and specific medication.

What Should You Do If Viscosupplementation Fails?

When conservative treatment, including viscosupplementation fails ... most knee arthritis sufferers believe their only option is total knee replacement surgery.

This is not true...and here is why

There is another treatment for serious knee arthritis pain most people (and even doctors) do not know about.

#2: Radiofrequency Treatment

This treatment is technically called, "Radiofrequency Neurotomy." Or RF for short.

RF is a procedure that is based the theory that blocking the nerve supply to the painful area may alleviate pain and restore function.

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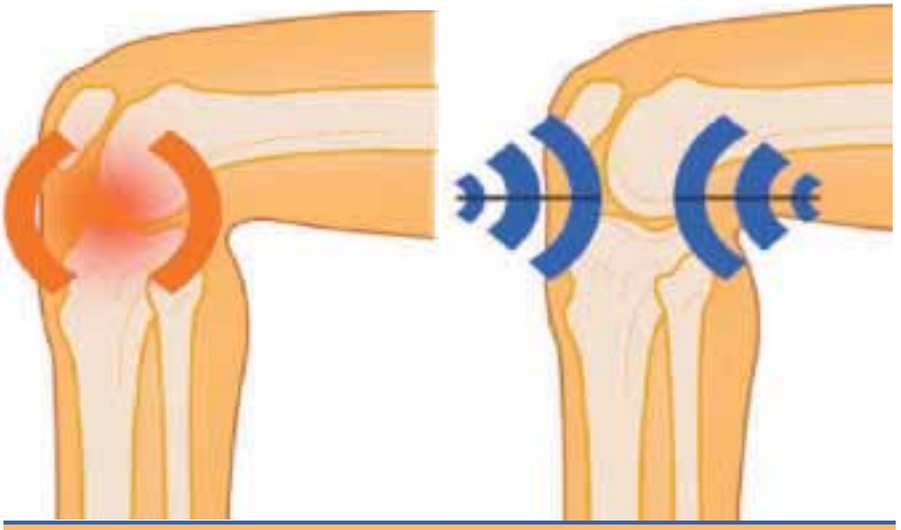
Needs To Know - Before Or After Knee Replacement Surgery

Advanced Treatment Uses Medical Radio Frequencies Waves To Relieve Pain



Science rescues knee arthritis sufferers?: **Radio Frequency Waves are used to block the nerve supply to the painful area and may alleviate pain and restore function to many. Many patients still in pain after a knee replacement may respond very well to these treatments allowing the possibility of avoiding additional surgery.**

Several branches of nerves that surround the knee are known as "genicular nerves."

Radiofrequency waves are delivered to the genicular nerves under advanced imaging to "block" the nerve from transmitting pain signals.

There are two distinct parts to this treatment. First, a test, diagnostic "G Block" procedure is done to determine if the procedure is going to decrease pain and improve function.

If this first "test" procedure is successful, then one to two weeks later, Radio Frequency waves are applied for term relief.

Is It Safe?

Research has shown this to provided significant relief for some patients. to procedure to be safe and effective.

One study published November 4, 2010 in the journal Pain found that RF treated subjects on average "achieved at least 50% knee pain relief at 1,4 and 12 weeks, respectively. No patient reported a post procedure adverse event during the follow-up period.

Some studies indiciate some patients may get years of relief in some cases. "RF neurotomy (radio frequency treatment) of genicular nerves leads to significant pain reduction and functional improvement in a subset of elderly chronic knee osteoarthritis pain, and thus may be an effective treatment in such cases."

It should also be mentioned that, like all procedures, results will vary patient to patient

Who Should Try This Treatment?

RF should be considered after other treatments, such as anti-inflammatory pain medication and viscosupplementation do not offer good enough results.

RF can be utilized before resorting to total knee replacement. RF allows many patients to avoid knee replacement surgery.

RF has also been found effective AFTER knee replacement surgery when the patient still feels pain.

The pain after a failed knee replacement surgery can be debilitating and this procedure can be the only thing that helps and give you relief.

What To Do Next If You Are In Pain

Here is the "X" factor many do not consider that might be the difference between you getting the best possible treatment or not.

Many experts suggest choosing a medical clinic that offers all these treatments and has the proper, most advanced technology all under one roof.

This way, the doctors working on your case can give you a proper examination and advise the best possible treatment plan for your individual case.

Several experts work as a team to offer you the best treatment options at the appropriate time to maximize results. It is also very convenient to have all your doctors and treatments in one place. Traveling to different offices can be time consuming and even more expensive.

NY Pain MD believes this "X" factor is one of the reasons so many knee arthritis sufferers travel from all over to be treated at their advanced medical clinics.

NY Pain MD offers a limited number of complimentary knee arthritis treatment screenings every month. These screenings are a way for knee arthritis sufferers to get some of their ques-tions answered and see if they are a candidate for one of the cutting-edge treatments offered at ***NY Pain MD***

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Showing off his Trump rump

The Naked Cowboy, Robert John Burck, performs in front of Trump Tower on Monday.
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Islamic State kills 24 with Baghdad car bomb, attack police stations in Samarra

An Islamic State car bomb killed 24 people in Baghdad's Sadr City district on Monday and the militants also attacked two police stations in the city of Samarra as Iraqi forces fought to oust the group from Mosul, its last major stronghold in Iraq.

At least four other attacks across Baghdad, some also claimed by Islamic State, killed nine more people earlier in the day, bringing the total death toll from bombings in the capital over the past three days to more than 60.

In the attacks in Samarra, about 60 miles north of Baghdad, security sources said multiple gunmen wearing suicide vests took over two police stations, killing at least seven policemen.

The wreckage of a vehicle following the blast GETTY IMAGES

The mayor of Samarra, Mahmoud Khalaf, said security forces had regained control, killing at least six assailants, but declined to comment on the number of casualties on the government side.

The pro-Islamic State news agency Amaq said the militants had executed some policemen.

The upsurge in violence comes as U.S-backed Iraqi forces try to drive Islamic State from the northern city of Mosul, where the militants are putting up fierce resistance.

Islamic State has lost most of the territory it seized in a blitz across northern and western Iraq in 2014 and ceding Mosul would probably spell the end of its self-styled caliphate. But it would still be capable of waging a guerrilla-style insurgency in Iraq and plotting or inspiring attacks on the West.

"The terrorists will attempt to attack civilians in order to make up for their losses, but we assure the Iraqi people and the world that we are able to end terrorism and shorten its life," Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said after talks with visiting French President Francois Hollande. REUTERS

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Trump: Chicago must seek US help if no progress cutting murder rate

Chicago has outlined plans to reduce violence, including the scheduled hiring of 970 police officers over the next two years to raise the total to 13,500.

President-elect Donald Trump said in a Twitter message on Monday that Chicago's mayor must ask for U.S. government help if the city fails to reduce its homicide rate, which hit a 20-year high in 2016.

The city responded that Trump and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel had previously spoken and agreed to ways the federal government could help.

"Chicago murder rate is record setting — 4,331 shooting victims with 762 murders in 2016. If Mayor can't do it he must ask for Federal help!" Trump tweeted.

The president-elect correctly reported crime numbers published by the Chicago Police Department on Sunday, but the figures were not record-setting.

Although up about 60 percent from the previous year, the 762 homicides in 2016 were the highest annual toll since 1996, when there were 796, according to police data.

During the presidential campaign, Trump periodically referred to Chicago, America's third most populous city, as an example of rising inner-city crime, which ticked up nationally in 2016 after a two-decade downward trend.

As candidate, Trump associated high-crime cities with their Democratic leaders. Emanuel is a former chief of staff to Democratic President Barack Obama.

A spokesman for Emanuel welcomed the prospect of working with Trump once the Republican takes office on Jan. 20, but noted Trump and Emanuel had already spoken on the issue. The two met in New York in December.

Police investigate a shooting where a 23-year-old woman was shot in the chest and hand and a 25-year-old man was shot in the leg on Jan. 1, 2017 in Chicago, Illinois. GETTY IMAGES

"As the president-elect knows from his conversation with the mayor, we agree the federal government has a strong role to play in public safety," spokesman Adam Collins said in a statement.

Collins said the federal government could help by passing stricter gun laws, improving cooperation between federal and local law enforcement and funding programs for at-risk youth.

"We are heartened he is taking this issue seriously and look forward to working with the new administration," Collins said.

Police in Chicago made more gun arrests in 2016 than in New York and Los Angeles combined, Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson said on Sunday.

"We will make 2017 a safer year for the city of Chicago."

Johnson

"We will make 2017 a safer year for the city of Chicago," Johnson told reporters.

Johnson said he would lobby the Illinois legislature to reform sentencing guidelines for repeat gun offenders. Police would also focus on "targeted, data-driven enforcement" and make community policing "a department-wide philosophy," Johnson said. REUTERS

BRIEF

Trump spokesman: No proof Russian hacking influenced US election

No evidence has emerged to suggest Russian hacking influenced the outcome of the presidential election and it would be irresponsible to jump to conclusions before receiving a final intelligence report, Donald Trump's spokesman said on Monday.

"There is zero evidence that they influenced the election," Sean Spicer told Fox News.

Due to become White House press secretary when Trump enters the White House on Jan. 20, Spicer told CNN the president-elect would see the intelligence report once it was completed later this week. On Saturday, Trump warned against being quick to pin the blame on Russia for the hacking of U.S. emails.

"The idea that we're jumping to conclusions before we have a final report is irresponsible," Spicer told CNN.

President Barack Obama expelled 35 Russian suspected spies and imposed sanctions on two Russian intelligence agencies last week for alleged Kremlin involvement in hacking that intelligence officials said aimed to help the Republican Trump defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton in the Nov. 8 election.

Leading lawmakers from both parties have voiced alarm at the suggestion of Russian interference, whether or not it made a difference in the outcome. REUTERS

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New Congress prepares to undo Obamacare, weigh Trump personnel picks

Obama is scheduled to meet on Wednesday with congressional Democrats to discuss strategies for fending off Republican attacks on Obamacare.

A new, Republican-controlled U.S. Congress convenes on Tuesday eager to repeal major portions of President Barack Obama's health care law and roll back environmental and financial industry regulations, but could quickly become embroiled in fights over President-elect Donald Trump's Cabinet choices.

Leading Democrats on Monday warned of a fierce fight over Obamacare, which is expected to have 13.8 million people enrolled in the program that aims to provide health insurance to economically disadvantaged people and to expand coverage for others.

Vice President-elect Mike Pence will meet with his fellow House Republicans the same day to rally them on repealing Obamacare, Politico reported.

Republicans in coming weeks will try to steer legislation through Congress using procedures that would not require Democratic cooperation. Their bill, which has not been unveiled, is expected to repeal Obamacare, but postpone the actions for two or three years while also maintaining some of the law's provisions.

"We're going to fight as hard as ever to protect the ACA [Affordable Care Act], said Representative Steny Hoyer, the House of Representatives' second-ranking Democrat.

Speaking to reporters, Hoyer and House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi said they would launch an effort to mobilize grassroots support for Obamacare by explaining how repeal would create a ripple effect hurting a majority of Americans.

The sun sets at the U.S. Capitol.
GETTY IMAGES

For years, Republicans have hammered away at Obamacare, insisting it was unworkable and was hampering job growth. With control of Congress and the White House, they will be in a position to enact a repeal bill.

The Senate will have more than legislation on its hands in the new year.

It has the daunting task of debating and voting on the scores of appointees Trump already has announced to head his Cabinet departments and for other top jobs in the new administration.

It also is expected to receive a Supreme Court nomination early on from Trump, triggering a likely confirmation war. REUTERS

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Four children die in Texas after chemical gas poisons home

Four minors died from chemical gas poisoning after a resident tried to fumigate a home in Amarillo, Texas with pesticide, fire officials told media.

A 17-year-old was found dead at the scene and three other children were transported to an area hospital where they later died, the Amarillo Globe-News reported.

The pesticide that was used contained aluminum phosphide, a chemical that, when mixed with water, creates phosphine gas, the newspaper said, citing local fire officials.

"This family may have been exposed to this for several days," Amarillo Fire Department Captain Larry Davis told local TV station KDFA.

"This family may have been exposed to this for several days."

Davis

Names of the victims were not released, and Amarillo fire officials were not immediately available for comment.

There were five other people exposed to the gas who were in stable condition at an Amarillo hospital, the newspaper said citing fire officials. One other patient was transferred to a hospital in the Texas Panhandle city of Lubbock, and there was no information on the status of that person. REUTERS

BRIEF

Man suspected of stealing Army Reserve weapons escapes Rhode Island jail

A getaway car thought to have been stolen by a man who escaped from a maximum security detention facility in Rhode Island over the weekend has been found in neighboring Massachusetts, authorities said on Monday.

James Morales, 35, suspected of stealing weapons from a U.S. Army Reserve Center in Massachusetts in November 2015, escaped from the Donald W. Wyatt Detention Facility on Saturday, prompting a manhunt.

The Massachusetts State Police said they have recovered the car believe was stolen by Morales.

"Morales remains at large and is being intensively sought by law enforcement," they said.

Morales is thought to have scaled a building and climbed over razor-wire fencing before stealing a getaway vehicle, local media reported the U.S. Marshals Service as saying, adding law enforcement found bloodied prison clothing they believe he was wearing at the time of the escape.

REUTERS

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Judge rules S. Carolina church gunman can act as own lawyer

Roof was found guilty in December on all federal charges in the shooting deaths of nine black parishioners at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina in 2015.

Dylann Roof GETTY IMAGES

A U.S. judge on Monday ruled Dylann Roof was mentally fit to serve as his own lawyer in the penalty phase of his trial, when a jury will decide whether to sentence him to be executed for the 2015 massacre at a South Carolina church.

The shooting where Roof had waited for members of a Bible study group to close their eyes in prayer before opening fire sent shockwaves across the United States.

The same jury that convicted him of 33 charges that included hate crimes resulting in death will meet on Wednesday for the penalty phase, where they will decide whether he should be executed.

U.S. District Judge Richard Gergel issued his ruling after hearing testimony from forensic psychiatrist James Ballenger, who examined Roof for five hours over the weekend.

Gergel had kept the competency hearing closed in order to avoid sequestering the jury.

Gergel said he was concerned jurors would inadvertently hear potentially prejudicial information from the hearing if reporters were allowed to cover it, ruling that protecting Roof's right to a fair trial outweighed the media's right to view the hearing.

The judge rejected arguments from press attorney Jay Bender and Assistant U.S. Attorney Jay Richardson, who wanted an open hearing. Gergel also banned relatives of the victims from attending.

The judge previously found Roof competent to stand trial after a hearing held in November ahead of the guilt phase. Roof represented himself during one week of jury selection in November during which prominent capital defense lawyer David Bruck was appointed standby counsel.

That same defense team filed a motion ahead of the penalty phase arguing that Roof was not competent to represent himself after he revealed at a hearing last week that he would not present any evidence or witnesses. REUTERS

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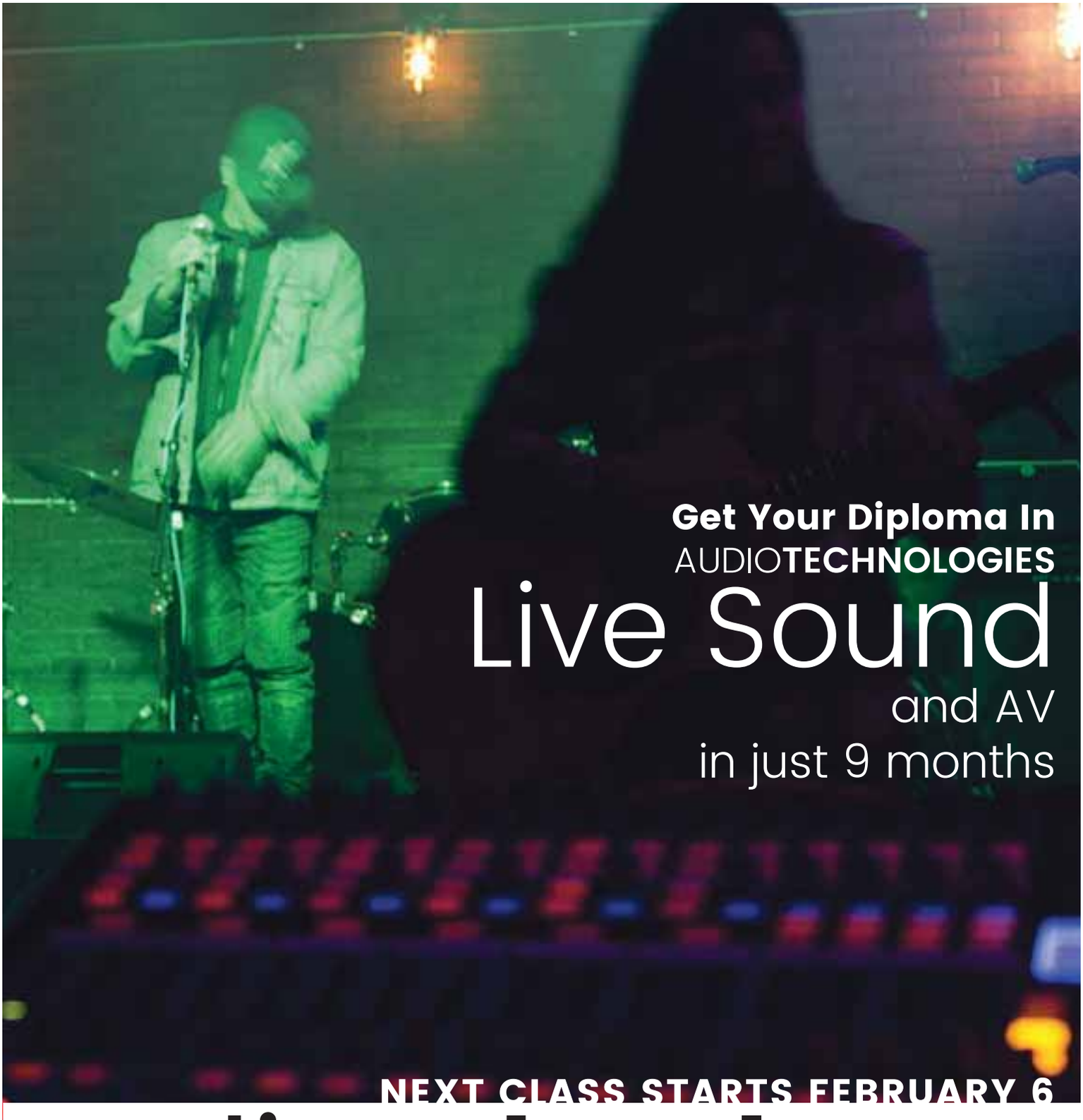

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SpaceX aims for Jan. 8 return to flight with Falcon 9 rocket

Space X, owned and operated by Tesla Motors Inc. CEO Elon Musk, has a backlog of more than 70 missions for NASA and commercial customers, worth more than $10 billion.

Elon Musk's SpaceX plans to resume flying rockets next week following an investigation into why one of them burst into flames on a launch pad four months ago, the company said Monday.

In a statement, SpaceX said it expected to launch a Falcon 9 rocket from California's Vandenberg Air Force Base on Jan. 8 to put 10 satellites into orbit for Iridium Communications Inc.

SpaceX had suspended flights after the same model rocket went up in a blaze on Sept. 1 as it was being fueled for a routine prelaunch test in Florida.

The explosion at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida destroyed the $62 million rocket and a $200 million communications satellite.

The company statement said that accident investigators concluded that a canister of helium inside the rocket's upper-stage oxygen tank had exploded.

In the short term, SpaceX plans to revamp its fueling procedures so that the supercold liquid oxygen will not build up between the helium tank's liner and its outer covering, it added.

SpaceX said accumulation of oxygen in a void or buckle in the liner most likely led to the explosion.

"In the long term, SpaceX will implement design changes to the [helium canisters] to prevent buckles altogether," the statement said.

The company did not say when new helium canisters would be ready to fly, but that using warmer temperature helium and a slower fueling operation will prevent them from bursting.

SpaceX has not said how much damage the Sept. 1 accident did to its primary Florida launch pad, nor when a new second pad in Florida, located at NASA's Kennedy Space Center, will be put into service. REUTERS

"Iridium is pleased with SpaceX's announcement on the results of the Sept. 1 anomaly as identified by their accident investigation team, and their plans to target a return to flight."

Company spokeswoman Diane Hockenberry said in a statement

SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket makes a successful launch with the SES-9 communications satellite on March 4, 2016 in Cape Canaveral, Florida. NASA VIA GETTY IMAGES

Bitcoin jumps above $1,000 for first time in three years

Digital currency bitcoin kicked off the new year by jumping above $1,000 for the first time in three years late on Sunday, having outperformed all central-bank-issued currencies with a 125 percent climb in 2016.

Bitcoin — a web-based "cryptocurrency" that has no central authority, relying instead on thousands of computers across the world that validate transactions and add new bitcoins to the system — jumped 2.5 percent to $1,022 on the Europe-based Bitstamp exchange, its highest since December 2013.

Though the digital currency has historically been highly volatile — a tenfold increase in its value in two months in late 2013 took it to above $1,100, before a hack on the Tokyo-based Mount Gox exchange saw it plunge to under $400 in the following weeks — it has in the past two years been more stable.

Its biggest daily moves in 2016 were around 10 percent, still very volatile compared with fiat currencies, but markedly lower than the trading of 2013, which saw daily price swings of as much as 40 percent.

Bitcoin may have been boosted in the past year by increased demand in China on the back of a 7 percent annual fall in the value of the yuan in 2016, the Chinese currency's weakest showing in over 20 years. Data shows most bitcoin trading is done in China.

Bitcoin GETTY IMAGES

Bitcoin is used to move money across the globe quickly and anonymously and does not fall under the purview of any authority, making it attractive to those wanting to get around capital controls, such as China's.

It is also may appeal to those worried about a lack of supply of cash, such as in India, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi removed high-denomination bank notes from circulation in November.

"The growing war on cash, and capital controls, is making bitcoin look like a viable, if high risk, alternative," said Paul Gordon, a board member of the UK Digital Currency Association and co-founder of Quantave, a firm seeking to make it easier for institutional investors to access digital currency exchanges. REUTERS

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Mariah Carey claims disastrous NYE show was sabotaged

She could've gone out on a high note, but Mariah Carey's team have decided to go low about her "performance train wreck" on New Year's Eve.

The pop diva's three-song set during "Dick Clark's Rockin' New Year's Eve with Ryan Seacrest" was plagued with technical difficulties, eventually revealing that she was lip-synching to her song "Emotion." Carey initially tweeted shortly after the performance that "s— happens," but her manager, Stella Bulochnikov is now saying Dick Clark Productions intentionally botched her performance.

Bulochnikov tells Billboard that Carey's in-ear microphones weren't working, and the show's production team refused to remove her portion of the program from the West Coast television feed. "I asked him why would they want to run a performance with mechanical glitches unless they just want eyeballs at any expense," she says.

Dick Clark Productions isn't having it though, calling the accusations "defamatory, outrageous and frankly absurd" and saying Carey's team is to blame for the tech mishaps. What we want to know is, where was Ryan Seacrest? A good host helps performers when they're struggling — even the audience pitched in, finishing one of Carey's song before she walked off-stage.

the word

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2017 has its first power couple — or does it?

The new year has barely begun, but 2017 may already have a new power couple.

Drake and Jennifer Lopez have certainly been making their relationship Instagram official, cuddling and kissing during an event called the Winter Wonderland Prom in Las Vegas last week — nothing weird about a 17-year age difference at a high school dance — then spending NYE together and being spotted by TMZ the next day gambling at the MGM Grand.

But here's where things get tricky.

Page Six reports that the "prom" was part of a music video shoot for a new song the two are working on. "This relationship is fake, it is just a publicity stunt to publicize their record together," according to the Post. "If Jennifer and Drake were really dating, they'd be way more private about it."

Expect Drizzy, 30, and J. Lo, 47, both tend to keep their dating lives strictly to the celebrity set, so privacy isn't exactly their top priority. That said, we know what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. Odds on this one being legit? Don't bet the block.

TWITTER/@TODAYSHOW

Katie Couric is back as 'Today' host

It may be the start of a new year, but after the one that just ended we're rightly a little suspicious. But at least every morning this week, we can pretend it's 1997.

In a welcome bit of deja vu, Katie Couric is back at the "Today" show in the co-anchor chair next to Matt Lauer. "Welcome back to Studio 1A, January 1997, apparently?" Lauer joked. "It just feels like I never left,'' said Couric, who started on the program as a special correspondent in 1989 before becoming the co-host in 1991. She left the show in 2006.

Morning TV's much-missed power couple even had the same hairstyle when they first shared the desk, as Couric noted. In reply, Lauer pointed to his shaved head as if to say, "It hasn't been the same without you, Katie." Or maybe that's just us.

Enjoy the retro vibes while you can — Couric is only around through Friday, keeping the chair warm for Savannah Guthrie while she's on maternity leave.

Lauren Conrad is expecting!

"The Hills" star-turned-lifestyle maven vowed to bring more joy into her life this year, and it turns out she's got a little bundle coming soon. Conrad, 30, announced she's expecting her first child with husband William Tell on Instagram.

"Happy New Year! I have a feeling 2017 is going to be the best year yet," the mom-to-be posted along with a picture of her sonogram.

Conrad and singer-turned-lawyer Tell, 36, were married in a private ceremony in 2014. When asked about getting hitched by US Weekly, she said, "For us it makes you officially family, which is really great, but as far as our relationship, we were really committed before so it didn't change a ton." Already feeling like family is a great first step to parenthood, congrats!

ALL PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES UNLESS STATED OTHERWISE

Taraji P. Henson wants to inspire young women

The "Empire" star talks about playing an under-known pioneer "Hidden Figures."

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In "Hidden Figures," Taraji P. Henson plays NASA mathematician Katherine Johnson, seen shaking hands with astronaut John Glenn (Glen Powell). **HOPPER STONE**

When Taraji P. Henson went to meet Katherine Johnson — the woman she plays in "Hidden Figures" — she was greeted at Johnson's home by her two daughters. They hugged her and told the "Empire" actress, 46, how happy they were she was going to play their mother.

"I was like, 'No pressure,'" Henson jokes.

Set in the 1960s, "Hidden Figures" tells the story of three women — Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan (Octavia Spencer) and Mary Jackson (Janelle Monae) — who were integral in the early days of the space race. Johnson was a mathematician whose brilliance helped John Glenn become the first American to orbit the Earth. In fact, right before his launch, he specifically requested she make sure the numbers for his mission were correct.

All three women were pioneers — not just women who rose in a STEM field, but black women living in Virginia in the early 1960s. Even while employees, all three faced discrimination, had to work harder to impress their white, male superiors. But when Henson talked to Johnson, now 98, she was surprised she didn't stew in her long-ago pain.

GETTY IMAGES

"I tried to make it weighty. I said, 'How does a black woman do it? They were misogynistic. I'm sure you got called the n-word.' And she was like, 'Well, you know, it just was the way it was. I just did my job,'" Henson recalls. "She was so humble. She would always say 'we.' In my mind, I'm like, 'No, Katherine, it was you. It was you and your mind alone that got Glenn to orbit the Earth. He didn't say, "Go get so-and-so, so-and-so and so-and-so. He said, 'Get the smart girl.' But the fact that she sees the 'we' in 'I' blew me away."

Henson was also blown away by Johnson's passion for math. She describes her eyes lighting up as she discussed her craft.

"If I had a teacher like her, I could have been a rocket scientist," Henson says. "When I was growing up, no one ever said to me, 'You can't do math because you're a girl.' But there was an understanding. You just grew up thinking math and science were for boys. Somebody lied to me, because this woman exists. All these women existed. I made it my mission to do this film, because I didn't want another girl to grow up believing that lie."

A key scene

One of the first scenes in "Hidden Figures" finds Johnson, Vaughan and Jackson on the side of the road on the way to work, fixing their broken car. Then a police car pulls up. A white cop comes out, looking suspicious. It's a scary scene to see right now — and all the more surprising when, upon finding they work at NASA, he changes his tune, even gives them an escort to work.

"You can feel the audience brace themselves when the cop arrives," Henson explains. "What's beautiful about that scene is you can see this man unlearn racism right before your eyes. It proves that your perception can change in a matter of minutes. That's when you know racism is learned. When he saw that these women's lives mattered to the great space race, that negativity he was about to spew on them shifted in the blink of an eye. If we can all get the human race back to some goal we can all focus on, I think the world will be more balanced. It's unbalanced right now."

The man who brought Bryan Cranston back to comedy

Filmmaker John Hamburg talks about "Why Him?"and what's up with James Franco.

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Sixteen years ago, John Hamburg co-wrote "Meet the Parents." He loosely revisits the idea of a woman's new guy meeting his potential future in-laws with "Why Him?" This time, Hamburg reverses the plot: It's the parents (played by Bryan Cranston and Megan Mullally) who visit the new guy (James Franco). Cranston's Ned is none-too-pleased to discover his daughter (Zoey Deutch) is in love with Franco's Laird, a nouveau riche Silicon Valley god who's heavily tattooed, very randy and something of a sweet idiot.

Comedies are another thing that have become, if not obsolete, then rare.

When I made "I Love You Man," which wasn't that long ago, studios were making a lot of these midrange comedies. I started to see, as I was working on other projects, that fewer and fewer of the types of movies I make were being made. Once in a while one would sneak out, but it was very rare. Viewing habits have changed, as everyone knows. It was pretty great for me and for our cast that we were able to have this huge studio, Fox, support our movie. I think they were like, "OK, guess we're going to make an original comedy!" [Laughs]

GETTY IMAGES

This is Bryan Cranston's first big comedy since "Breaking Bad" changed his life. I'm imagining he was really excited to try something lighter.

I think "Why Him?" came at the right time for Bryan. He's this great character actor who worked on every TV series known to man, then broke through with "Malcolm in the Middle" playing a true goofball. Then obviously he became an icon with Walter White. I think all that darkness for six years, while a defining moment of his life, also took a toll on him. I think he was looking for something lighter, to use all those comedy chops he'd developed on "Malcolm in the Middle" but hadn't been put to use for a while. He's another genius. He comes to play, and he's a consistent source of ideas and suggestions. He's a very twisted man. No matter what you think, of the more edgy moments in the movie, I'd say a handful were his pitches.

James Franco, left, plays a Silicon Valley god who meets the parents (Bryan Cranston and Megan Mullally) of his new girlfriend (Zoey Deutch) in "Why Him?" TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

On Franco

James Franco does so many things: He writes books and paints and adapts difficult Faulkner and Cormac McCarthy novels into art movies. I was wondering what it's like to wrangle him over to a comedy.

A lot of my favorite actors to work with can do both drama and comedy. Franco certainly has both sides. He's a savant. He likes to sit close to set reading a book, very focused and doing his thing. You're like, "Is he listening? Is he present?" But that's just his way, to show up and focus and be quiet and not schmoozing with the other actors all the time. Apparently he's been like that his entire career. But once you get him in front of the camera, between "action" and "cut" he is just on fire. He knows every line, is brilliant at improv, is able to make adjustments, is very present with the other actors. He's one of the best actors I've ever worked with.

Busy Philipps talks self-care in the new year

The actress partners with Campbell Soup's #WellYesMoment.

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Busy Philipps agrees that the pressure to make — and keep — New Year's resolutions can be overwhelming.

"They're tough, right?" says the actress. "Everyone has that experience of making that lofty, unrealistic New Year's resolution only to feel like a total failure two weeks in, and that's not a great way to start your year off."

The 37-year-old, who first won us over as lovable bully Kim Kelly in "Freaks and Geeks" and is now making us laugh as Neal Gamby's (Danny McBride) ex-wife Gale Liptrapp in the HBO comedy "Vice Principals," prefers the idea of making smaller, incremental changes.

Philipps GETTY IMAGES

She's partnered with Campbell's Soup to promote its #WellYesMoment, a campaign encouraging folks to share their small daily victories — year round.

The effort is in conjunction with the release of Campbell's line of Well Yes! Soups: nine flavors featuring wholesome, nutritious ingredients in preservative-free, non-BPA lined cans. The hearty choices include a black-bean soup with red quinoa, and a sweet potato and corn chowder with red peppers and wild rice.

"I really enjoy soup as a quick, easy thing to eat for lunch," says the mother of two. "And I'm a firm believer in being able to pronounce things on labels. I won't buy things for me or my kids if it seems like it's not whole, simple ingredients — I'm not interested in putting it in my body."

Daily positive moments

What does a #WellYesmoment mean to Philipps? Taking time for yourself and avoiding the guilt trip, especially as a working mother. "If I need to go get a facial, I'm not going to feel bad about that. I'm going to enjoy that moment," she says.

The concept also informs her post-election approach to the new year.

"Everybody's got this thing, like, 'Let's hope that 2017 isn't as terrible as 2016.' Look, there is so much in the world that is out of our control, and we know that," she says. "But we can control the positive things that we can do on a day to day basis — and maybe there is something to it. If we all choose to have a more positive outlook, then it's a butterfly effect that can really change things."

Busy Philipps has partnered with Campbell's to promote its Well Yes! line of soups. PROVIDED

Especially when it comes to service work. "Opening up your checkbook is amazing; the other thing is, people can give their time, which is free, and in many ways, more valuable," she says, adding that she strives to teach her kids the value of helping those less fortunate.

In the Lenny Letter article "After the Election," Philipps shares a recent conversation she had with her 8-year-old, Birdie. "We will fight for what's right and for people who can't fight," she tells her. "We will keep volunteering and raising money for things like public libraries ... and the ACLU and Planned Parenthood."

Staying fit for the mind and body

Philipps has a, well, busy year ahead. Season Two of "Vice Principals" drops in the summer, and in the meantime, she's sold a pilot to HBO and is writing a film, which she hopes to also direct.

To keep motivated, the California resident makes sure she exercises regularly.

"I need the endorphins," she says. "Working out is as important to me for my body and my brain. If I don't, it's a noticeable difference — I get dark real fast." When traveling for work, as soon as she lands she'll hit up a SoulCycle or squeeze in a run.

"It's very important to sweat," she says, adding that she's really into infrared saunas right now. "Go to Higher Dose on the Lower East Side," she says. "You'll feel like you've gotten a full body massage."

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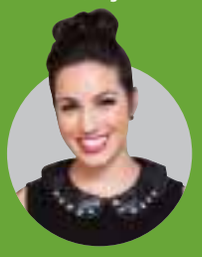
What should you really look for in a partner?

LAURIE DAVIS EDWARDS

Single and Swiping

Laurie Davis Edwards is the founder of eFlirt, an online dating concierge service, and the best-selling author of "Love @ First Click: The Ultimate Guide to Online Dating."



ISTOCK

"Am I too picky?" a client recently asked. Maybe it's something you've wondered while searching and swiping, too.

I hear this question most from those who've dated a lot. Naturally, your feelings of who would be a good match for you may be fuzzy after a dozen first dates.

While you can re-evaluate what you're looking for in a partner any time of year, New Year's is a natural time for reflection — particularly if attracting a long-term relationship is one of your resolutions.

Here's how to give your love life a reboot:

First, throw away your list

Our ideas of what we want and don't want in a partner are based on experience. But often, people have one experience and then restrict themselves. For example: You go on a date with a man who has kids and it doesn't work out, so dating someone with children becomes a deal-breaker.

A deal-breaker is something you can't live with in a relationship. Everyone has them. But often our "list" involves things that aren't must-haves. We allows these traits to determine who we won't date — before we've even shared a cocktail with the person.

In the New Year, throw away your massive list of must-haves and date with only true deal-breakers in mind.

Then, get curious about yourself

What would happen if you focused more on finding a match for yourself than worrying about what he or she will be like before you meet them?

You don't know who your next relationship will be with, so you can't clearly identify that person. But you can define who you are.

Fill in the sentences "I am…" and "I am not..." Getting clear with yourself allows you to shift your focus from an arbitrary list of what has and hasn't worked in past relationships, to what will and won't work for you presently.

Laurie Davis Edwards is the founder of eFlirt, an online dating concierge service, and the best-selling author of "Love @ First Click: The Ultimate Guide to Online Dating."

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3 Ways to celebrate the first week of 2017

ISTOCK

Joe Pera GETTY IMAGES

Sip on negronis, see some art, hear some jokes

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The Year That Must Not Be Named is finally behind us! Now that your hangover has worn off and you're ready to start fresh and embrace the new year — which we hope will be gentler than the last — here are three ways to ring in your first week of 2017.

Negroni Wednesday at House of Yes

Because it's hump day and you know you'll have trouble getting through the first week back to work, say yes to a night of $7 negronis at this Bushwick bar and performance space. The bittersweet combination of equal parts Campari, gin and vermouth garnished with an orange twist will be the perfect remedy for your mid-week woes.

Jan. 4, 7 p.m.-1 a.m., 2 Wyckoff Ave., Brooklyn

See "Wreath Interpretations"

Whether you're struggling to let go of Christmas or are simply a fan of the wreath as a timeless motif, Wednesday is your last chance to view this exhibit of creative takes on the holiday adornment. More than 40 contributors, from artists to everyday New Yorkers, submitted wreaths made of unconventional materials at Arsenal Gallery.

Jan. 5, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., free, Fifth Avenue at 64th Street

11th annual 50 First Jokes NYC

Kick off your first weekend of 2017 with humor at the Bell House's annual night of 50 First Jokes. On Friday, a massive roster of 50 comedians — from veterans like Brooklyn's Joe Pera, "Tonight Show" writer Jo Firestone and "SNL" writer Julio Torres, as well as up-and-comers — will each tell their very first joke of the year.

Jan. 6, $15, doors open at 7 p.m., show at 8 p.m., 149 Seventh St., Brooklyn

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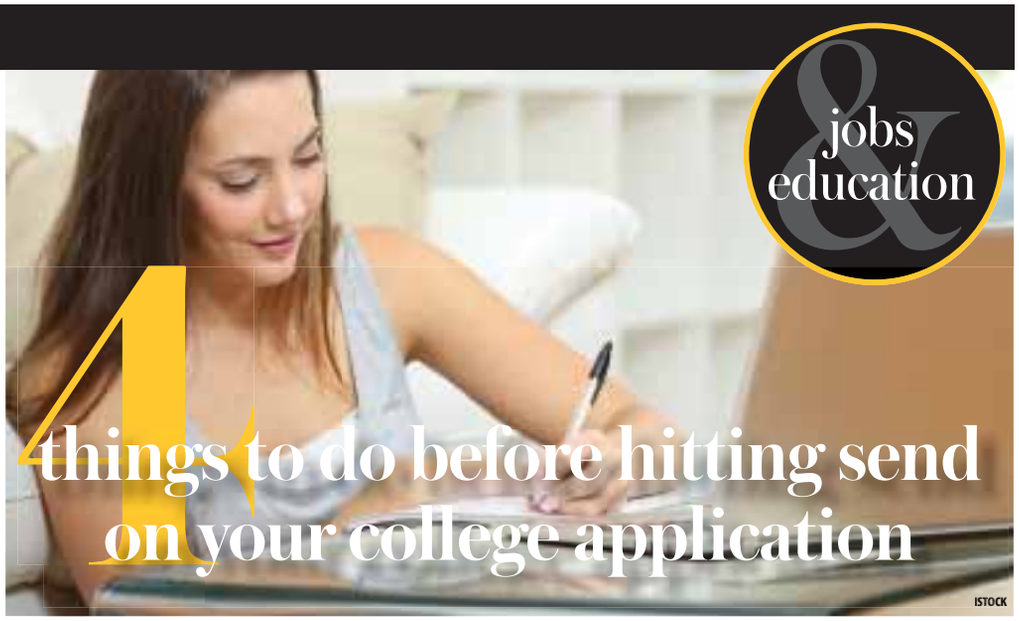

4 things to do before hitting send on your college application

ISTOCK

Don't let a careless mistake ruin your chances.

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Many high school seniors are spending the first few weeks of the new year putting the final touches on their college applications. While many students may just want to cross their fingers and finally hit send, it's best to take a deep breath and ensure you haven't made any last-minute mistakes.

"As students get ready to turn in their applications, we like to emphasize that human beings will be reading their applications, and that it's important to understand the admissions office's perspective," says Devin Harmon, a college-admissions counselor with the college consulting firm IvyWise. He gives us some pointers on making your application stand out.

Do a second read of your application

"I tell students to read everything out loud," says Harmon. "It's a proofreading thing, and it will also help you catch small errors and hear how your voice sounds in your answers." Harmon says students should have a relative read along silently. "When you write something and a word is missing, your brain is automatically going to put it in there. The person reading along will catch it," he says.

Look for cliches

It's important to remember that admissions officers sift through hundreds of applications each year. "They sometimes go through 90 applications a day," Harmon notes. "That can be tiring and montonous, and they tend to see the same kinds of essays and the same catchphrases over and over." Harmon recommends avoiding saying things like "I've always loved economics since I was a child" or sounding too academic in answers that are supposed to be personal.

Don't wait until the last minute

This might seem obvious, but in addition to opening yourself up to making careless mistakes, waiting until the last possible moment to submit your application can have other consequences. "In the last several years, so many students send off the common application on the last possible day, and right after they hit send they get an error message. It's like seeing the iceberg on the Titanic. That's definitely something to avoid."

To avoid disaster scenarios like that one, Harmon advises students to turn in their applications at least a week ahead of the final deadline and to plan accordingly.

Keep yourself grounded

Harmon urges students to remain realistic throughout the process. "What are you planning to do after you hit the submit button?" he asks. "If you get deferred or wait-listed from your top choice, they will want to see improved grades over the next quarter. You have to be the best student you can be."

While it can seem like not getting in to your top school is the most devastating thing that can happen, its important to keep some perspective. "Applying to college is not the start of your life, and it's not the end of your life," says Harmon. "You want to keep improving, no matter what."

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Ace difficult work meetings

Practice makes perfect, even when it comes to talking to your boss

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Always prepare for a meeting with your boss. ISTOCK

Picture this: You have just been scheduled to have a meeting with your boss about a difficult work project in two days. What do you do next?

If you are like most people, the answer is worry and panic.

"The first mistake people make is that they avoid preparing," says Hal Movius, the author of the book "Resolve: Negotiating Life's Conflicts With Greater Confidence" (out Jan. 7). "Sometimes people believe that preparing won't help and decide to take a wait-and-see approach. But preparing is really important. You shouldn't wing it."

Movius shares these tips for anyone dreading their next meeting.

Think of the counterarguments

"Spend some time imagining the other side of the story," he suggests. Imagine what your boss expects from the project you are working on and what she'd say to you. Movius says spending some time thinking of how she would address the problem will help you narrow down what you want to say.

When negotiating ask questions

"The fundamental negotiation error is to misconstrue negotiation only as an act of persuasion," says Movius. Instead, Movius recommends thinking of negotiation as a conversation in which you ask questions. "Great negotiators ask questions and listen to the answers two times more than unsuccessful negotiators," he notes. "Before asking for a raise, you might ask your boss, 'How do you think I've done in this position?' or 'What are the valuable ways I can help you in this job?'"

Practice, practice, practice

Another big mistake many employees make is not practicing their negotiation pitches out loud. "Thinking something or writing something down uses a different part of your brain than saying it out loud," says Movius.

"Think of it this way: Watching someone swim is a lot different than actually getting in the pool yourself. Having a negotiation is the same way."

Movius notes there are a couple of ways to prep for an upcoming meeting. "You can do it yourself and film yourself with your cellphone," he says, "but it's more powerful with another person."

Ask a friend if they would mind playing the part of your boss or coworker in your meeting. "You can just ask 'What do you observe?'" says Movius. "They might say something like 'You opened by criticizing the other person' while you thought you were explaining the situation."

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NFC playoff picture much more muddled

The Patriots have a clear path in the AFC, but the NFC could get messy.

MATT BURKE
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The Giants could very well go into Big D and win this month. GETTY IMAGES

For years it was "sasquatch in the city-like" rare for the No. 1 seed in the AFC and the No. 1 seed in the NFC to both reach the Super Bowl in the same postseason. But recent football history has turned rarity into ordinary, as in the past three seasons the top seeds in each conference have made the big game (Denver vs. Carolina in 2016, New England vs. Seattle in 2015, Denver vs. Seattle in 2014).

This year, the Patriots have the No. 1 seed in the AFC and they are heavy favorites to get to the Super Bowl for the seventh time under Bill Belichick. They are without their second-best player, Rob Gronkowski, but the Pats' road to Houston is a pretty one nonetheless. In the divisional round they will host one of the following three quarterbacks/teams: Brock Osweiler/Tom Savage (Houston), Matt McGloin/Connor Cook (Oakland), or Matt Moore/Ryan Tannehill (Miami). Far from a murderers' row of signal callers there, and it would certainly be a tall order for any of them to win in Foxboro against a healthy Pats squad.

Meanwhile in the NFC, No. 1 Dallas' road to Houston is significantly tougher. The Cowboys will host either Aaron Rodgers' Packers, Eli Manning's Giants or Matthew Stafford's Lions in the divisional round. Not only will the competition be stiff one way or another, but Dallas' lack of postseason experience could very well come into play. No rookie QB has ever won a Super Bowl, and while Dak Prescott's inaugural NFL campaign has been otherworldly, the postseason is an entirely different animal.

Sleepers

The No.5-seeded Giants are the obvious sleeper in the NFC as the GMen have not only had previous postseason success in Green Bay, but they've also slayed the conference's top dog – Dallas – twice this season. New York's defense hasn't allowed a team to score more than 25 points on them in a game since Week 3 (a 29-27 loss to Washington), and the unit looks like it is getting hot at the right time.

In the AFC, keep an eye on the No. 6-seeded Dolphins. While beating the Pats in Foxboro would classify as a miracle, Miami could very well upset No. 3 Pittsburgh this weekend. The Steelers' defense is mediocre at best (16th in pass defense, 13th in rush defense) and Miami back Jay Ajayi had his breakout game in a Dolphins win over Pittsburgh earlier this season (204 yards rushing in a 30-15 Miami win).

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MATURE BECKHAM READY TO MAKE NOISE IN PLAYOFFS

OPINION

KRISTIAN DYER
@KristianRDyer

Odell Beckham Jr. has done a better job of ignoring the noise, of late. GETTY IMAGES

In a game he he was baited, where the other team was trying to push his buttons, it was instead a restrained, suddenly-mature Odell Beckham Jr. who showed that he is ready for the playoffs. Beckham's finally acting like a man that has this New York Giants team pointed in the right direction, this after a tough 19-10 win at the Washington Redskins.

The story of Beckham and his emotions is well-known, of course. This is a player who undoubtedly is known around the league for his lack of restraint. Yet it was Beckham, on Sunday, who took the high road in moments where, earlier this season, he might have lashed out.

In the past, Beckham has been lured into physical contests and altercations with Washington cornerback Josh Norman — dating back to last season's infamous tussle when Norman was a Carolina Panther. They had some tussles in their first meeting, but on Sunday Norman was again attempting to lure Beckham into some antics.

And why not? Beckham after all has shown that he can be petulant at times, immature and prone to the kind of outbursts that can minimize his contributions as the greatest asset on the Giants roster. He's done it before and Norman, in a game where Washington needed a win to get into the playoffs, was trying to play this advantage.

Norman didn't succeed this time though, despite his best attempts to get under Beckham's skin.

Beckham didn't lash out when Norman started chirping. He didn't retaliate when the Washington cornerback took a couple shots at him. No kicking nets were attacked, no walls slammed with his head. Instead he walked away. In the second quarter, Norman hit Beckham out of bounds and the Giants wide receiver didn't bite. He simply jogged back onto the field. A headbutt by Norman didn't even get Beckham's ire.

Cool. Calm. Collected.

A playoff state of mind.

If Beckham had lost it, gone mental on the sidelines, then the whole league would have been on notice and the four potential teams that they could have played in the NFC wild-card round would have been taking notice. He's proven to be susceptible to moments of mental and emotional weakness, hurting not himself but becoming a distraction in every meaning of the word.

For the only player in the NFL who can take Odell Beckham out of a game is Odell Beckham.

In his showing of maturity, however, Beckham showed that he is ready for the playoffs. More than just his solid production in one half of play where he had five catches for 44 yards, Beckham's demeanor and mental strength showed someone ready for the postseason. He didn't throw a fit when head coach Ben McAdoo sat him in the second, choosing to rest his star player who is a bit banged up.

When Giants superfan Joe Ruback yelled to Beckham from the stands and asked him if he was going back in the game, Beckham didn't whine and cry. He didn't mouth off. There was no scene. Nothing for the cameras to catch, and nothing for talk radio to yak about all week.

Instead, he threw some wrapped up athletic tape at Ruback. Fitting on a day where he didn't throw in the towel when Norman tried to get him to check-out of the game.

Now, for the first time in his NFL career, he's ready to check into the playoffs.

Giants ready to take on Packers

The Giants have had plenty of success at Lambeau Field over the years and they'll have to conquer the Packers one more time in their house if they hope to advance in the NFC playoffs. New York's wild-card round matchup with Green Bay is slated for this coming Sunday (4:40 p.m., Fox).

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Arthur Nicholas Terranova, Esq., Referee Knuckles, Komosinski & Manfro, LLP 565 Taxter Road, Ste. 590 Elmsford, NY 10523 Attorneys for Plaintiff

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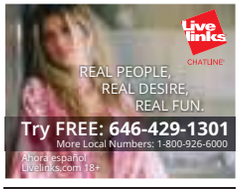

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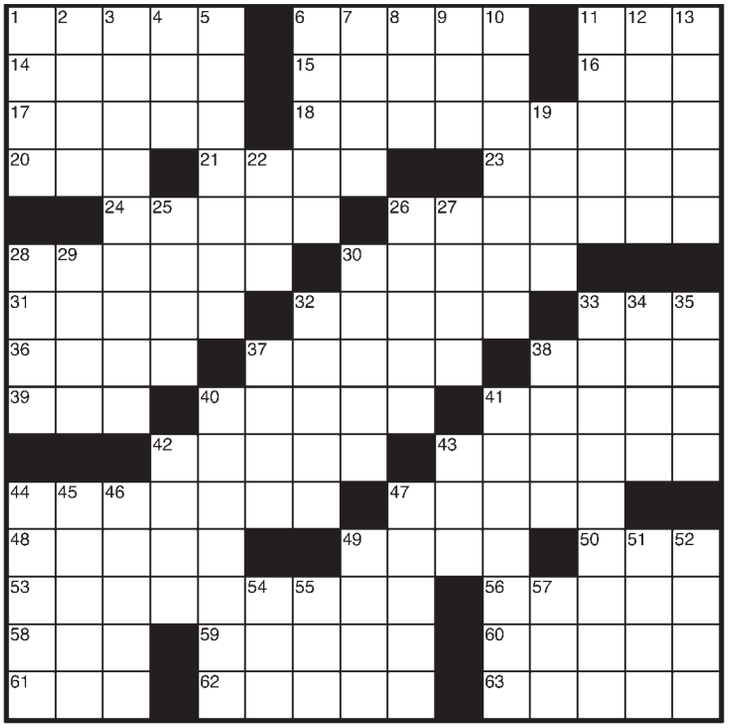
26 Catamounts
27 Tiny margin
28 Kind of curl
29 Matty or Felipe
30 Wanton looks
32 Zoo heavyweight
33 Caustic
34 Coffee servers
35 Worn to a frazzle
37 German industrial region
38 Hitter -- Rose
40 Lowly laborer
41 Sporty socks
42 Reflect upon
43 Wheel buy (2 wds.)
44 Weary sounds
45 Oil-well capper Red --
46 Fall colors
47 Yawning gulf
49 "Vogue" rival
51 Superman, incognito
52 Vortex
54 PBS funder
55 Youngest Cratchit
57 Tenn. neighbor



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easy

1			8	6		3		
4	2	3				7		
	8			2				
		8	7	5			2	1
5	6			1	3	8		
				8			5	
		1				4	6	9
		2		3	9			8

hard

		8			1			
5		6	7		8			1
		3	9			8		
7			1	2				
	3	1				7	2	
				8	7			3
		5			6	4		
4			8		5	6		7
			4			9		

metro.us/horoscopes

Aries Maintaining a strong sense of discipline and living within your means will help you reduce stress. Too much of anything will lead to problems at work and in the home.

Taurus Do something nice for someone; it doesn't have to entail a hefty price tag. Living within your means will help keep your stress level low and your bank account fat.

Gemini Listen to your heart, not to what others tell you. Don't feel that you have to overachieve to make an impression. If someone doesn't accept you, move on.

Cancer Explore new avenues, travel to unfamiliar places and do things that excite you. Live in the moment and strive for self-awareness and perfection. Make love a priority.

Leo Set up a routine that will help you strive to look and be your best. Changes at home will initially help, but if you don't follow through with them, nothing will change.

Virgo Mixing business with pleasure will lead to stronger alliances. An important partnership will improve if you spend more time nurturing it and less time trying to buy love.

Libra It's a good day to initiate change. If someone beats you to it, you aren't going to be happy with the outcome or the time it will take you to revise your plans.

Scorpio Make your home a place of comfort, and designate a space that you find conducive to creative pursuits. It's OK to do things differently. Don't wait for validation.

Sagittarius You need to re-evaluate matters and think about what you could have done differently. It's never too late to learn or to change your mind or direction.

Capricorn Your charm will help you win favors from people who can contribute to your success. Express your feelings in order to receive the encouragement you need.

Aquarius A change will do you good. Something you always wanted to do will be possible now. Volunteer for something you believe in or negotiate on your behalf.

Pisces Your charm will help you win favors or gain the support you need from someone influential. Don't feel pressured to make an impulsive decision. EUGENIA LAST

December 28th's answers

F	I	A	T	S	■	G	A	F	F	■	S	I	R	S
A	L	G	A	E	■	A	L	O	U	■	A	N	I	L
T	I	A	R	A	■	B	L	O	T	■	F	U	S	E
H	A	T	■	L	I	L	Y	L	I	V	E	R	E	D
A	D	E	L	I	N	E	■	■	L	I	T	E	R	S
■	■	■	I	O	C	■	W	E	E	P	Y	■	■	■
T	O	K	E	N	■	M	A	L	L	S	■	E	M	U
A	R	E	S	■	M	O	L	L	Y	■	I	N	S	T
J	O	G	■	B	U	T	T	E	■	H	O	S	T	A
■	■	■	C	E	D	E	S	■	B	E	N	■	■	■
U	N	S	O	L	D	■	■	C	A	R	S	E	A	T
N	E	W	B	A	L	L	G	A	M	E	■	U	R	E
P	A	I	R	■	I	O	U	S	■	T	I	B	I	A
E	T	N	A	■	N	O	R	A	■	I	C	I	E	R
G	O	E	S	■	G	N	U	S	■	C	H	E	S	S

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